

family life, or your business life when you got in trouble because things were going well and you broke your concentration. You relaxed; you got diverted; you got divided; you got indulgent.

Well, the country is no different. We have to realize this is a truly precious moment. In my lifetime, it has never happened. And the reason I want Dick Gephardt to be the Speaker is I think that we ought to—yes, we made a lot of advances in education, but we don't have a world-class education for all our children, and we shouldn't stop until we do. Yes, we continue to pay down the debt at record rates, and we've got the first back-to-back balanced budgets in 42 years. But we haven't extended Social Security beyond the life of the baby boom generation; we haven't extended Medicare and added that prescription drug benefit when 75 percent of the seniors in this country can't afford the medicine they're supposed to take. So we haven't dealt with the challenge of the aging of America as much as we should.

We haven't done everything we should do to make this the safest big country in the world. We ought to close the gun show loophole in the Brady bill. We ought to pass the child trigger lock legislation. It's not just crimes that are the problem. We have the biggest accidental death rate by guns in the world. And to give you an idea of how bad it is, the American death rate, accidental death rate from guns, is 9 times the rate of the next 25 biggest industrial economies combined. So I think it's worth a little extra to have those child trigger locks.

We've still got serious challenges in health care. We ought to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. We ought to let people over 55 who don't have health insurance anymore buy into Medicare. We ought to continue our work to help children, enroll children in our health insurance program and cover other people who don't have it.

We've got a chance to do something serious about poverty for the first time in a generation. One of the things that I'm most encouraged about on our side in the Presidential debate is there is an almost complete consensus that part of our bounty ought to be used to drastically cut child poverty in this country. And that's good. We also have an

opportunity that we have not had in my lifetime to bring free enterprise and investment into the most distressed areas of the country. And I have been going around the country trying to highlight these things.

I consider this a big opportunity. And as all of you who live on the Internet know, technology gives us a chance to bring economic opportunity to people and places that were hitherto too isolated to take advantage of it.

Now these are just some of the big challenges that are out there. And I promise you, I fought through this last budget. I've been through this thing now from can't to can't for 6 years. I'm here because I do not believe my country will realize its full potential unless they are in the majority and unless he is the Speaker. And I think if he is, they will.

So I ask you, tell people what was in the budget and why. Tell people what's happened in the last 7 years and why. And most important, tell people what we can do in the future if we have the right people representing you, and help them win. It is profoundly important.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Bill and Sally Hembrecht; Art Torres, chair, State Democratic Party; and Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr., of San Francisco.

### **Statement on the Anniversary of the Brady Handgun and Violence Prevention Act**

*November 30, 1999*

Today, on the sixth anniversary of the historic Brady law, I am pleased to announce new figures that demonstrate the profound impact this legislation has had on public safety. Data released today by the Department of Justice show that the Brady law, since its passage in 1993, has helped block over 470,000 sales by licensed gun dealers to felons, fugitives, stalkers, and others prohibited from purchasing firearms. In the last year alone, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System created under the Brady law has blocked sales to over 160,000 of these restricted buyers. These numbers,

of course, are not just numbers. They represent lives saved, injuries avoided, tragedies averted. They are a measure of what we can do to reduce gun violence—and a measure of what still needs to be done.

In addition to our success with the Brady law, this administration has taken important actions to crack down on the illegal market that supplies juveniles and criminals with firearms. Today Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers will launch the newest tool to fight illegal gun dealing—“Online LEAD,” a new technology to help law enforcement across the country use crime-gun tracing data to catch more illegal gun traffickers more quickly. As a result of these efforts and those of communities across the country, violent gun crime is down by over 35 percent since 1992, and the murder rate is at its lowest level in over three decades. But while we are more effective than ever before at keeping guns out the wrong hands, our work is by no means finished. Over 32,000 Americans still lose their lives in gun-fire every year, including 12 children every day. That is why I pledge to make passage of commonsense gun legislation my top public safety priority next year. And I challenge Congress to make a New Year’s resolution to do the same.

### **Statement on Signing the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act**

*November 30, 1999*

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 2116, the “Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act.” This comprehensive bill will improve a broad array of benefits and services for those to whom we owe our freedoms—our Nation’s veterans.

This bill is especially significant for its approach in the provision of enhanced extended-care services to veterans. It firmly establishes that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should accord the highest priority for nursing home care to the most severely disabled veterans and those needing care for service-connected disabilities. It will also ensure that veterans enrolled in the VA health care system receive noninstitutional,

extended-care services, including geriatric evaluations and adult day health care.

The bill also expands opportunities for military retirees to utilize VA health care services, at Department of Defense (DoD) expense and in accordance with an agreement to be developed by DoD and VA. The DoD and VA will ensure this agreement allows for the provision of high-quality managed care and increased choice, in the most cost-effective manner for the Federal Government.

This bill includes many other important health care provisions. For example, H.R. 2116:

- Expands veterans’ eligibility for reimbursement of emergency care costs when VA or other Federal health care facilities are not accessible.
- Extends and expands VA’s authority to provide health care services to victims of sexual trauma.
- Makes more active duty personnel eligible for VA substance dependency treatment.
- Authorizes VA to update the schedule of copayments charged for certain health care benefits to generate additional program funds.

I am also pleased that the bill will make it easier for surviving spouses of disabled former prisoners of war to qualify for survivor benefits; expand certain education benefit entitlements; extend VA’s authority to guarantee home loans for members of the Selected Reserve; and both extend and enhance programs for homeless veterans.

These are but the high points of a comprehensive bill that will enhance many benefits and services our veterans and their families justly deserve. I thank all who were involved in its passage.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
November 30, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 2116, approved November 30, was assigned Public Law No. 106–117.